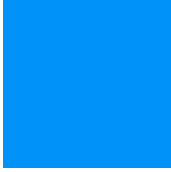


Campus Compact



# Better Discourse

## A Guide for Bridging Campus Divides in Challenging Times

*Produced as part of Campus Compact's Scaling Discourse in Higher Education Project, supported by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations*

### Contributors

- [Sara Drury](#)
- [Allison Briscoe-Smith](#)
- [Nicholas V. Longo](#)
- [Lisa-Marie Napoli](#)
- [Rachel Winslow](#)
- [Matt Farley](#)
- [Laura Weaver](#)

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The 2023–2024 academic year was rife with polarization and division across higher education. Encampments, protests, and free speech controversies garnered lots of attention while illuminating a fundamental challenge to the core enterprise of higher learning: a breakdown of dialogue across lines of differences.

**Colleges and universities are vital to educating the next generation to be active and effective participants in our democracy—where they can learn to talk across differences, bridge divides, and, ultimately, address public problems.** The disconnect between our aspirations as beacons for democracy and the reality of our experiences as students, faculty, staff, and administrators raises the stakes for our work. As the wider society struggles with division and polarization, **colleges and universities must do better.**

This challenging moment, however, is an invitation to find new ways forward—to reject cynicism and polarization by intentionally creating space for better discourse.

### ★ What we mean by “better discourse”

Respectful, informed, and purposeful conversation across lines of difference. By engaging in this kind of dialogue, people discuss various viewpoints with the intent to learn, understand, and, sometimes, collectively decide.

Auspiciously, higher education is prepared to take on this task. Since our founding four decades ago, Campus Compact has seen higher education significantly deepen its commitment and focus to its public mission. Many colleges and universities today are equipped with the robust infrastructures, resources, and diversity of knowledge that can support inclusive, constructive dialogue—better discourse—that serves as the foundation for healthy communities.

**61%**

of U.S. adults reported that having political conversations with people they disagree with is generally frustrating.<sup>1</sup>

**63%**

of college students said their campus climate prevents people from saying things they believe.<sup>2</sup>

**88%**

of college students believe colleges should encourage students and professors to interact respectfully with people whose beliefs differ from theirs.<sup>2</sup>

**From our field survey:****92.5%**

agreed or strongly agreed that their campus needs resources and training on the intersection of civil discourse and public engagement.

**Israel–Palestine, U.S. election & anti-racism**

Primary themes of interest from respondents.

**▶ Where to begin**

As you pick up this guide, you might be looking to create spaces for conversations on really contentious issues, such as the 2024 election or the war in Gaza, or find ways to celebrate inspiring work already happening on your campus that seems overlooked in the larger narrative of doom and despair. Regardless of where you are at this moment, this guide is meant to meet you in the moment and help you create better discourse.

This guide is a back-to-campus starter kit for everyone in higher education—no matter your role or experience practicing better discourse. It includes invitations for self-reflection and a corresponding guide for mapping your campus. It also directs you to tools, policies, and evidence-based practices for better discourse that are already available—and that can work for all campus leaders.

**Values of better discourse**

Better discourse requires sharing stories, listening, asking questions, and finding common ground. We must create spaces that are safe and courageous, where multiple voices, perspectives, and experiences are valued. It relies on a foundation of these values:

Being aware of your own power and positionality

Practicing intellectual humility

Naming and framing issues so that various perspectives feel included

Recognizing people's gifts, assets, and potential

Fostering respectful and authentic relationships

Engaging in purposeful action and reflection

**About the campus guide**

This guide was created in an effort to quickly respond to campus needs to engage in better discourse for what many expect to be an uncertain and potentially tumultuous 2024–2025 academic year. With support from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, a summer work group assessed current campus needs and priorities by conducting a survey and focus groups of diverse campus stakeholders and interviewing leaders from national civil discourse organizations. This guide is meant to encourage campus leaders to engage in reflective inquiry, find allies, and advance better discourse on campus and in society. This guide is not designed to be a comprehensive list of resources and examples.

This is produced as part of the larger [Scaling Discourse in Higher Education Project](#), supported by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations. The longer-term project will build upon the data and work this summer to build, curate, and share resources that will assist campuses in assessing and accessing evidence-based practices and resources for better discourse.

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center. (2023, September) [Americans' Dismal Views of the Nation's Politics](#)

<sup>2</sup> Jones, P. & Arnold, A. (2024). [Reluctance to Discuss Controversial Issues on Campus: Raw Numbers from the 2023 Campus Expression Survey](#). Heterodox Academy.

## Where are you starting from?

# Self-reflection & guiding questions

To begin work that responds to crises, we must first understand where we are beginning, what resources we have at our disposal, and what we hope to achieve. These guiding questions offer an inquiry-based approach to help us examine ourselves and our contexts, discern paths, and find allies to advance better discourse on campus and in society.

Before diving into better discourse practices, we encourage you to engage in this exercise of intellectual humility—to spark innovation and creativity by seeking ideas, insights, and perspectives that might not otherwise emerge.

### Source & inspiration

The questions have been largely inspired by our own experiences as practitioners and by the struggles, needs, and hopes articulated by participants in our field survey and focus groups. These questions are also informed by the National Public Housing Museum's [36 Questions of Civic Love](#), Arthur Kleinman's [explanatory questions](#) and Margaret Wheatley's [Eight Fearless Questions](#).

## ▶ How to begin

- **Reference the framing questions below or in the [full inquiry guide](#)** to begin the reflection that is key to moving forward. If you are struggling with definitions, overwhelmed by challenges on campuses, or experiencing feelings of isolation, these questions will explore these issues and unearth potential solutions.
- **Create a community for these conversations.** Try to create a group of 5–8 individuals that represent different units on your campus. It could include people from student life, diversity offices, academic affairs, community engagement, alumni relations, marketing, or other areas.
- **Slow down and reflect.** We are asking for courage in moments of extraordinary and real fear. You will likely feel challenged and uncomfortable at times, but slowing down and reflecting are key components found to be effective in de-escalation and reducing polarization.

## ★ Reflective inquiry

**What does better discourse mean? What does civil discourse mean to you? To your campus?**

*Who is doing civil discourse work on your campus? How can you find out? Who could you ask to find out?*

**What are the most pressing needs on campus? What do you see as the “problem” in terms of discourse?**

*What do you think others on campus think the problem or crisis is about? What do you fear most about this problem?*

**What’s the campus climate like? How has your campus managed conflict and discourse before?**

*What has been successful? Who could you ask to find out? What can you learn from situations that have been unsuccessful?*

**How can we center relationships to promote better discourse? Who do you turn to for support?**

*Who is an unsung hero on your campus doing work that inspires you? How can you learn from them? Collaborate with them?*

**How do we move forward & resource our community? What has been most helpful to you in challenging times?**

*What is your superpower? What are your community’s superpowers? What is your kryptonite? What support do you need?*

## Access our in-depth reflective inquiry guide

The questions here are intended to get you started in thinking reflectively.

We recommend you embark on an in-depth process using [the full inquiry guide](#) to examine your context both individually and with a group.

## ▶ Now what

By reflecting on these questions, we hope you emerge with a clearer understanding of where you are, what assets you already have, and ways to identify the help you might need. It is possible that you simply don’t know the answers to many of these questions, where the policies are, who is doing this work, or how different problems are framed. Please know that this is understandable and you are not alone in this realization. This is an important diagnostic step to identify how you might proceed next and how to make sense of the resources available.



## Activating your campus community

After spending time reflecting on your context, you probably have a sense of what you need to move forward—but you might not yet know how to get started. This can feel overwhelming, but the good news is there are people on your campus and across higher education who can assist.

*“Getting [civil discourse] offerings in place isn’t terribly challenging, but doing so at scale is a challenge. And we know that one-off programs aren’t going to have a profound impact.”*

### ★ Taking an asset-based approach

When engaging with better discourse practices, we recommend bringing an asset-based approach. Many of the activities during the 2023–2024 academic year were reactive, risk management-oriented, prioritized minimizing media backlash, and lacked inclusive campus deliberation, which led to higher levels of disconnection and disagreement.

#### Understand your assets

The decentralized nature of higher education makes it difficult for institutions to fully understand the expertise within their campus, as most colleges and universities have people, disciplines, and departments with formal expertise in debate, dialogue, and deliberation.

Asset mapping is a tool that can be used to begin the process of identifying expertise, but it can also illuminate gaps or opportunities to scale discourse practices. There are numerous thematic mapping frameworks, and your institution likely has experts in various approaches. Two that can be helpful are [Colorado College’s community engagement](#) approach and the AAC&U Institute for Democracy in Higher Education [Democracy Re-Designed Toolkit](#), which applies a student engagement and leadership lens.

#### Build upon your assets.

While programs, practices, and policies are all critical to the institution and community’s culture building, the campus’s primary asset is its people. People need supportive spaces to learn and practice deliberation skills and facilitation. 64.8% of respondents to our field survey agreed or strongly agreed that their institution needs external service providers to facilitate civil discourse workshops or training and discussion-based events on campus.

### ▶ Leveraging external service providers

While an asset mapping approach may reveal your campus has more resources than realized, some institutions may also seek external service providers. You can use this list of external service providers as a way to open up deeper conversations about what might be most useful to meet your specific campus needs. **Ultimately institutions can’t outsource the solutions, but they can leverage the expertise of outside providers that can lend additional perspective, resources, and support.**

### External service providers

Want to bring in external help? Check out this [listing of service providers](#) to learn which organizations or models might work best for your campus.

### ▶ Investing in collaboration & communication

To combat the siloed nature of higher education, campus leadership should make efforts to connect their identified assets and help expand program offerings, reach, and impact. Knowledge of efforts, and the policies and procedures that impact these efforts, need to be prioritized. Approximately 35% of respondents noted that they were unsure of their own institutional policies related to hosting campus events, holding student or public protests on campus, or the creation of public spaces for civil discourse.

## ★ Approaches to better discourse

Here, you'll find practices, projects, and programs—many grounded in evidence-based approaches—that you can implement on your campus. You will also find stories of inspiration from our data collection, interviews and focus groups that illustrate successful civil discourse work-in-action that we rarely hear about.

This is not a comprehensive list, but rather a starting point. This document surely misses valuable resources (we've heard about many resources and others that are likely being developed as we write). Our intention is to meet the current moment and provide supportive resources to aid you in moving toward better discourse.

### If you want to **get started**, then...

Check out these **low-barrier-to-entry guides and programs** to learn how to talk across differences

- [National Issues Forum Institute guides](#) on a variety of topics, including the election, free speech, and inclusive campuses
- [Living Room Conversations](#) guides for small groups on a range of topics, including conversations in troubled times, elections, cancel culture, belonging, and empathy
- [Unify Challenge College Bowl](#) opportunities for one hour, intercollegiate, one-on-one conversation across differences
- [Constructive Dialogue Institute Perspectives](#) online learning program for students focused on listening across differences and navigating hard conversations

Learn about some of the **methods of dialogue and deliberation** from providers like [National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation's Streams of Engagement](#), or access free training resources in bridge-building and better conversations

- [Collaborative Discussion Toolkit](#)
- [Bridging Differences' EdX course](#)
- [Interfaith America's We Can Build Bridges course](#)
- [Greater Good Science Center's Building Bridges on Campus](#)

Start a **book group** around recent book, like *We Need to Build: Fieldnotes for Diverse Democracy* by Eboo Patel, *I Never Thought of It That Way* by Mónica Guzmán, or *Try to Love the Questions* by Lara Hope Schwarz



At **Miami Dade College**, a large community college in Florida, faculty and staff have created opportunities for students across their eight campuses to be a part of the Unify Challenge College Bowl. Students are put into pairs for a one-hour online experience to connect across differences. Students from Miami Dade said they were nervous before the conversation, but after, they shared in [videos](#) that the experience “open[ed] perceptions,” made them feel “more comfortable to open up in the future,” and helped them “hear from different perspectives.”

### If you want to **integrate better discourse into the curriculum**, then...

Offer **dialogue assignments into courses**. Consider the following resources:

- Unify America's [Unify Challenge College Bowl](#)
- [College Debate and Discourse Alliance](#)
- Moral Courage's [short resources](#) to engage students
- Braver Angels' [Curricular Toolkit](#)
- [Practicing Democracy: A Toolkit for Educating Civic Professionals](#)

Host a **learning community for faculty, students, staff, or administrators** on civil discourse that integrates with existing professional development opportunities, such as new hire orientations, workshops, and summer training, like Providence College's [Conversations for Change](#).

Create a **certificate program or minor** with civil discourse as its foundation like [this one at Indiana University](#). Or, develop a new first-year seminar on civil discourse.

Provide **mini-grants for faculty** to revise courses or develop assignments related to civil discourse.



The **Davidson College** Deliberative Citizenship Initiative's [Deliberation Across the Curriculum](#) program offers training for faculty from different disciplines to develop and offer deliberations in their courses. They suggest 3 ways faculty can integrate deliberation: one-time modules, embedding deliberation throughout the course, and deliberation-focused courses. Davidson has offered a deliberative pedagogy training program for faculty from other colleges and universities through the Deliberative Pedagogy Collaborative project.

## If you want to integrate better discourse into co-curricular student life, then...

Consider building civil discourse skills into orientation programming using these resources

- [Constructive Dialogue Institute Perspectives](#)
- [Othering & Belonging University](#) from the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley

Offer train-the-trainer model to your campus community with support from these providers and resources

- [Collaborative Discussion Project](#)
- Greater Good Science Center's ["Bridging Differences" Playbook](#)
- Sustained Dialogue Institute's [Campus Network](#)
- Essential Partners' [Dialogue in Higher Education](#)
- Resetting the Table's [Campus Programs](#)
- Interactivity Foundation's [Collaborative Discussion Coach Training and Toolkit](#)

Create student organization chapters and programs focused on civil discourse by partnering with

- [BridgeUSA](#)
- Heterodox Academy's [HxA Campus Community Network](#)

Create a "Living/Learning" program focused on bridging divides, such as the [experiential living-learning community at Carleton College](#)



**Emory University's [Emory Conversation Project](#)** shows how building collaborative discussion skills don't just happen in the classroom or with highly funded programs. For the past three years, the Project, sponsored by Campus Life, has fostered safe spaces for students to have conversations with those who hold different perspectives. These simple face-to-face encounters have trained students to ask better questions, build curiosity, and value difference.

## If you are addressing protests, free speech controversies, political scrutiny, or other campus crises, then...

Identify policies, procedures, and point people responsible for the creation and dissemination of those documents. Some resources include:

- Divided Community Project's [Leading a Divided Campus](#)
- PEN America's [Campus Free Speech Guide](#)
- Host a forum with campus legal council regarding policies
- [Review policies around speech](#) in light of the coming election

**Cultivate the practices of community-wide dialogue.** Examples include:

- Integrate civil discourse into existing programs, events, and projects. For instance, add small group conversations following Convocation and other public lectures.
- Host a panel with experts who disagree. See the [Heterodox Academy speaker list](#) and [Braver Angels speaker list](#) for support.
- Check out the [Sustained Dialogue Institute's campus-wide approach](#) to understanding the "problem behind the problem."
- Use issue guides from [Essential Partners](#), [Living Room Conversations](#), and [National Issues Forum Institute](#).

**Have a collaboratively created and well-communicated plan for supporting the challenges of doing better discourse on campus.** Possible steps include:

- Work through the tabletop exercises in the [Bipartisan Policy Center's guide](#)
- Connect resources, like campus safety, student life & engagement offices, and conduct codes, in the context of contentious issues and activism
- Design and use an internal communications tree to disseminate information about the status (emotional, physical, etc.) and situation for campus members
- Resources and training available through the Crisis Prevention Institute's [nonviolent crisis management training](#)



After making national headlines for a contentious discussion on free speech, one campus turned to dialogue experts at Essential Partners to help. Over five years, they launched a program to train faculty and students to speak and listen differently. And they saw the value of such an investment after October 7. As other campuses struggled with emergency responses, this university offered vigils, conversations, and campus events that reflected their dialogue training. An op-ed in the student newspaper celebrated the campus' ability to disagree better.

## If you aim to **make better discourse an institutional priority**, then...



At **North Carolina State**, what started as a simple student facilitator training blossomed into widespread campus change. Students used materials from Living Room Conversations to train those in the Service Fellows program. It then expanded to the Honors Village, where students leaned into having better conversations around disagreements. The efforts were so meaningful that the North Carolina State Campus Conversations Project team built a learning community with Winston Salem Community College to begin a regional collegiate culture committed to better conversations.

**Host an institutional discussion around best practices** for promoting better discourse.

- Bipartisan Policy Center’s [Campus Free Expression: A New Roadmap guide](#)
- [“Pluralistic campuses will foster the bridge-building our divided nations need,”](#) by Eboo Patel and Rebecca Russo
- Revisit your campus policies for free speech. Check out the policy, procedures, and community training from the University of California System [Free Speech and Civic Engagement Center](#)

### Join a Community of Practice

- For senior leaders: Constructive Dialogue Institute’s [Leadership Institute](#) or Institute for Citizens and Scholars’ [College Presidents for Civic Preparedness](#)
- For faculty: National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation’s [Higher Ed Learning Exchange](#)
- For students: BridgeUSA [Leadership Development](#)
- For staff: Greater Good Science Center’s [Bridging Differences in Higher Education Learning Fellowship](#)

**Create a “democracy wall”** for free expression and community conversation

## If you aim to **advance dialogue between higher education and the public**, then...

Engage the local community in campus–community dialogues or joint problem–solving. This can be done through a campus center, such as the [CSU Center for Public Deliberation](#).

Meet and talk with community leaders, such as city and council leaders, to better understand issues and to educate on strategies for better discourse. Invite key stakeholders for well–rounded representation and promote the event through a wide range of media and organizational outlets.

Use an issue guide, like those mentioned earlier, or other related document to spark a constructive conversation that can move the participants beyond binary thinking.

Create opportunities for alumni to connect with students, faculty, and staff.



## Scaling Discourse in Higher Education

Assisting campuses in accessing effective and evidence–based bridge–building, dialogue, and discourse practices to increase students’ abilities to engage across difference. Learn more at [compact.org/scaling-discourse](https://compact.org/scaling-discourse).



*This campus guide and the Scaling Discourse in Higher Education Projects are generously supported by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations.*



**Campus Compact**

Campus Compact  
89 South Street, Suite 603  
Boston, MA 02210

[compact.org](https://compact.org)

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# Better Discourse

## ★ Reflective Inquiry Guide

### Uncovering your context

*Better Discourse: A Guide for Bridging Campus Divides in Challenging Times* was created in an effort to quickly respond to campus needs to engage in better discourse for what many expect to be a continuously uncertain and potentially tumultuous 2024–2025 academic year. This is produced as part of the larger *Scaling Discourse in Higher Education Project*, supported by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations.

To begin work that prevents conflict or responds to crises, we must first understand where we are beginning, what resources we have at our disposal, and what we hope to achieve. These guiding questions offer an inquiry-based approach to help us deeply examine ourselves and our contexts, discern our paths, and find allies to advance for better discourse on campus and in society. These questions encourage self reflection and campus communication that creates a community that works to meet the needs of the moment.

After you have thought about these questions for yourself we encourage you to ask these questions of multiple members of the community, students, staff, administrators and faculty. Task forces, department meetings, workgroups or over a coffee—there is no “right way” to bring folks together to do this—rather the purpose is to support relationship building to clearly discern the help that is needed and how to address the need.

## What does better discourse mean to you?

- What does civil discourse mean to you? To your campus?
- Who is doing civil discourse work on campus? How can you find out? Who could you ask to find out?
- Where is civil discourse in your mission, curriculum and campus at large?
- Is a focus on discourse an institutional priority?

## What are the pressing needs?

- What do you think the most pressing need on campus is?
- What do you see as the “problem” in terms of discourse? If you gave this problem a name, what would it be?
- Do people on campus have a shared sense of what the issues or problems are?
- Do you see this need as a crisis? Do others?
- What do you think others (faculty, students, and administrators) think “the problem” or crisis is about?
- What do you fear the most about this problem?
- How has this problem impacted you? Who or what has helped you manage this impact the most?
- What do you think are solutions, treatments, or ways of addressing this issue?
- What do you think other groups think the solutions, treatments, or ways of addressing the issues are?
- What is your hoped for outcome? How can it get better?
- If you had a magic wand to achieve your outcome, what would it be?
- Do you think students, faculty, staff, or administrators would say the same thing? Why or why not?
- Who has worked or is currently working to solve, address, or resource this problem?
- Does what is happening on campus require a different response from you? From others? How can it be potentially prevented in the future?



## What's the campus climate like?

- What's your style of managing conflict? Can you imagine ways of contributing toward a peaceful solution?
- How has your campus managed conflict and discourse before? Who could you ask to find out?
- What has been successful in dealing with campus conflicts? What have you learned from situations that may have been unsuccessful?
- How do you find bright spots of what's working well on campus?
- How do you envision your campus overcoming challenging dynamics?
- What do you love about your work and your campus?
- What do others—students, faculty, administrators, and staff—love about your campus?
- What are your campus' free speech policies? Who knows them? Where can you find them?
- What are your campus policies regarding academic freedom? Who knows them? Where can you find them?

## How can we center relationships to promote better discourse?

- Who do you turn to for support when you are overwhelmed by campus conflict?
- Who do you love to work with and be around? Why?
- Who do you find most challenging to work? Why?
- Who is the "other"—the people or group who is most often talked *about* but not *with*?
- Who is an unsung hero on your campus doing work that inspires you? What can you learn from their example? How can you collaborate with them?
- Where is your place of peace in your working relationships? What does it look like? How do you get there?

## How do we move forward and resource our community?

- What has been the thing that has been most helpful for you to manage challenging times?
- Is there anything you need to handle challenging situations that you feel is not currently possible or accessible? How can you overcome this, perhaps with support from others?
- What is your superpower? What gift can you bring to this work?
- What's your kryptonite?
- What are the superpowers of your community—its students, faculty, staff, and administrators?
- What skills do your students, faculty, and administrators need to engage in better discourse?
- What support do your students, faculty, and administrators need?
- Who is equipped and ready to address the issues? Are they at the table?
- In what ways can technology help to address this issue?
- In what ways has technology made discourse harder?
- What's missing?

## Now what

Our hope is that through reflecting on these questions on your own and in community you might have emerged with a clearer understanding of where you are, what you have already with you to have better discourse or the help you might need. You may have identified that you simply don't know the answers to many of these questions, don't know where the policies are, or who is doing this or how different the problems are framed. Please know that this is understandable and you are not alone. This is an important diagnostic step to identify how you might proceed next and how to make sense of the resources provided.

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# Better Discourse

## ★ Resources for Addressing Current Issues

Fall 2024

As you reflect on implementing better discourse on your campus, you might be looking to create spaces for conversations about some of the most contentious issues of our current moment. Below, find some places to start when initiating discourse on these specific topics.

### Israel and Palestine

- [Guide to Dialogue About Israel–Palestine](#) from Essential Partners and Interfaith America  
This guide provides a framework for small group discussions about Israel and Palestine, with information on creating spaces for dialogue, structures for reflective listening, sample dialogue agendas, and prompts.
- [Multivocal Education on Israel and Palestine](#) from Resetting the Table  
Resetting the Table offers a “non-prescriptive educational setting” framework that demonstrates a variety of viewpoints on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. This program requires working closely with Resetting the Table to adapt it to institutional contexts.

### The 2024 election

- [Resisting Polarization in an Election Season](#) from Essential Partners  
This framework offers a self-guided training for creating better discourse around elections, with 4 modules that could be incorporated into personal or campus training.
- [Everyone’s IN: How Should We Encourage and Safeguard Voting?](#) from National Issues Forum Institute  
This free deliberative discussion guide, newly revised and launched in July 2024, offers online and in-person forums to discuss security concerns for the upcoming elections. It then proposes three approaches to addressing these concerns.
- [Additional 2024 Election Year Resources from NIFI](#)
- [2024 Election Guidebook](#) from Constructive Dialogue Institute  
Based on research conducted with 21 institutional stakeholders, this guidebook offers principles to prepare for the upcoming 2024 election, as well as strategies for leaders, faculty, staff, and civic engagement and DEI centers.
- [Voter Education and Engagement](#) from American Association of State Colleges and Universities.  
This website contains several resources related to the American Democracy Project’s voter projects and activities, including voter registration information and a YouTube playlist with videos on information literacy during elections, polarization, and developing campus–community ties for this election season.
- [Trust in Elections Initiative](#) from Living Room Conversations  
LRC has developed a conversation guide to support building public trust in our elections at the local, state, and national levels. They have received funding to incentivize those who participate in this initiative as a way to further support fostering conversations on this important topic.
- [Talking About Politics](#) resources from Living Room Conversations

## Race, diversity, ethnicity & belonging

- [Essential Partners](#) has several resources that can support your institution's conversations on race, ethnicity, diversity, and belonging. Below are a few available
  - [Race in America](#)
  - [Stereotyping Exercise](#)
  - [White Ally Dialogue Script](#)
  - [Fostering Dialogue Across Divides](#)
- [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resource Guide](#) from Heterodox Academy
- [American Neighbor](#) from Interfaith America  
This documentary film series by the Nantucket Project and available from Interfaith America explores race in America immediately following the murder of George Floyd through conversations in towns along the Mississippi River from Minneapolis to New Orleans. Join the journey by watching the five American Neighbor documentary films.
- [Talking About Race](#) resources from Living Room Conversations  
A collection of conversation tools and resources from Living Room Conversations focused on racial equity.
- [Anti-Racist Community Engagement: Principles and Practices](#) book and free digital companion from Campus Compact  
This book, published by Campus Compact, and its free digital companion were released in 2023. They are organized around a set of principles and practices developed by the editors as part of their shared work and dialogue with colleagues regionally and across the country.

## Campus discourse and conflict resources

- [Transforming Conflict on Campus](#) from the Aspen Institute's Citizenship and American Identity Program and Constructive Dialogue Institute.  
This resource identifies contributors to campus conflict, principles for transforming campus conflict, strategies that work, and a discussion guide for use in institutions of higher education.

*[Better Discourse: A Guide for Bridging Campus Divides in Challenging Times](#) was created in an effort to quickly respond to campus needs to engage in better discourse for what many expect to be a continuously uncertain and potentially tumultuous 2024–2025 academic year. This is produced as part of the larger [Scaling Discourse in Higher Education Project](#), supported by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations.*



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# Better Discourse

## ★ Listing of Bridge-Building & Civil Discourse Service Providers

[Better Discourse: A Guide for Bridging Campus Divides in Challenging Times](#) was created in an effort to quickly respond to campus needs to engage in better discourse for what many expect to be a continuously uncertain and potentially tumultuous 2024–2025 academic year. This is produced as part of the larger *Scaling Discourse in Higher Education Project*, supported by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations.

Below, you can find a listing of national bridge-building and discourse service providers. We want to remind you that this is not a comprehensive list but rather a starting point. This list surely misses some providers, including organizations that are broadly focused on supporting institutions of higher education and may have a program devoted to dialogue and discourse, and especially those organizations doing this work outside the higher education landscape. Additionally, beyond these national providers, there may be local, state, and regional ones that can further support your institution's work. In the coming year, we will be collecting more information and fostering deeper partnerships with these and other national organizations in order to foster community campus cultures ripe for better discourse.

### Braver Angels

[Braver Angels](#), launched in 2016, is leading the nation's largest cross-partisan, volunteer-led movement to bridge the partisan divide for the good of our democratic republic. By bringing Red and Blue Americans together into a working alliance, Braver Angels is building new ways to talk to one another, participate together in public life, and influence the direction of the nation. By creating opportunities for meaningful discussions, Braver Angels works to dial down the heated rhetoric that gets in the way of real conversations and an accurate understanding of our differences. The objective is not to push an agenda or change participant's minds but rather to provide a safe place for deeper understanding.

### BridgeUSA

[BridgeUSA](#) is a bipartisan student movement that champions viewpoint diversity, responsible discourse, and a solution-oriented political culture. Its purpose is to build a community in which students from across the ideological spectrum can work together to understand—to bridge—the various perspectives behind the important political and social issues of our time.

### Collaborative Discussion Project

[The Collaborative Discussion Project](#) is an ongoing experiment created by dialogue and deliberation experts, practitioners, and educators to explore these questions. The project includes 3 key components:

- A toolkit containing intentionally designed activities to teach collaborative discussion skills and mindsets.
- Trainings, workshops, webinars, and community of practice gatherings led by community members.
- Curated certificate programs for classrooms, communities, and workplaces.

### College Debates and Discourse Alliance

[College Debates and Discourse Alliance](#) was founded in partnership with Braver Angels, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, and BridgeUSA to teach students to honor ideological diversity, foster civil discourse on college campuses, and cultivate student and faculty leaders to carry the movement forward. These debates are not competitive or performative events separating speakers and audiences. They are immersive and highly participatory, inviting everyone in the room to express themselves freely in a collective search for truth. Conducted in a light parliamentary format and chaired by trained experts, they teach students to express their views, frame persuasive arguments, listen deeply, and engage respectfully around the most challenging political and social issues dividing our nation today.

### Constructive Dialogue Institute

[The Constructive Dialogue Institute](#) (CDI) works with institutions across the education, for-profit, non-profit, and public sectors to help them communicate across differences and build inclusive cultures. CDI begins by developing educational tools based on cutting-edge behavioral science research. Then, it rigorously evaluates the effectiveness of its tools to iterate and improve them on an ongoing basis. It conducts original research to elevate the value of constructive dialogue and disseminate new insights to the public.

## Essential Partners

Essential Partners (EP) believes that every community has the power to improve the way it approaches differences of values, views, and identities. For more than three decades, EP has helped civic groups, faith communities, colleges, and workplaces foster resilience, cohesion, understanding, and trust. They do this in several ways:

- By training stakeholders in their trademark approach
- Through long-term collaborations to shift community or institutional cultures
- By co-creating new proprietary programs and materials
- Through remote consultation and coaching
- By facilitating community dialogues about divisive topics

## Everyday Democracy

Everyday Democracy builds capacity within individuals and groups working to strengthen local democracies through dialogue, engagement, and action with a racial equity lens. They provide facilitation, coaching, and tools to support truthful dialogue and deliberation, unleashing the power of community storytelling, remembrance, and reclamation to heal and transform our communities. Everyday Democracy is a capacity-building organization that provides technical assistance to individuals and groups working to build multiracial democracies within their local communities.

## Greater Good Science Center

The Greater Good Science Center (GGSC) studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society. Based at the University of California, Berkeley, one of the world's leading institutions of research and higher education, the GGSC is unique in its commitment to both science and practice: Not only does the GGSC sponsor groundbreaking scientific research into social and emotional well-being, but it also helps people apply this research to their personal and professional lives.

## Heterodox Academy

Heterodox Academy (HxA) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit membership organization of thousands of faculty, staff, and students committed to advancing the principles of open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement to improve higher education and academic research.

## Institute for Citizens & Scholars

The Institute for Citizens & Scholars cultivates talent, ideas, and networks that develop young people into empowered, lifelong citizens. It believes today's young people are particularly poised to strengthen democracy now and for the long haul. It is cultivating a majority of young people to be civically well-informed, productively engaged, and committed to democracy.

## Interfaith America

Interfaith America (IA) inspires, equips, and connects leaders and institutions to unlock the potential of America's religious diversity. Led by Founder and President Eboo Patel, Interfaith America inspires, equips, and connects leaders and institutions to unlock the potential of America's religious diversity. Utilizing a research-backed approach, IA works across higher education, racial equity, health, workplace, bridgebuilding, democracy, and technology. IA provides expert consultation, training, curricula, and resources to positively engage religious diversity. They value collaboration and developing robust institutional partnerships to leverage interfaith cooperation as a proven approach in solving challenges.

### Bridging the Gap

Bridging the Gap (BTG) is an initiative of Interfaith America. BTG envisions a culture where the heroes are the bridge builders. Towards that goal, the program is designed to reduce the polarization in our country by giving students, faculty, and administrators the skills they need to find common ground across deep divides while solving problems on their campuses and in their communities.

## Living Room Conversations

Living Room Conversations (LRC) connects people within communities and across differences through dialogue to build trust and understanding. They believe belonging starts with conversation and are committed to designing the resources and opportunities that allow everyone to feel seen and heard while celebrating the differences that make us unique. LRC's four organizational pillars—respectful connection, open and curious of human experiences, building and supporting community, and fostering belonging and inclusion—help guide their work.

## National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation

The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) is a network of innovators who bring people together across divides to discuss, decide, and take action together effectively on today's toughest issues. NCDD serves as a gathering place, a resource center, a news source, and a facilitative leader for this vital community of practice. The NCDD website is a clearinghouse for literally thousands of resources and best practices, and their highly participatory national and regional conferences have brought together more than 3,000 practitioners, community leaders, public administrators, researchers, activists, teachers, and students since 2002.

## National Issues Forums Institute

National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves to promote public deliberation about difficult public issues. Its activities include publishing the issue guides and other materials used by local forum groups, encouraging collaboration among forum sponsors, and sharing information about current activities in the network. They also offer training opportunities and resources for moderating forums based on the National Issue Forums framework of deliberation.

## Sustained Dialogue Institute

Sustained Dialogue Institute (SDI) is a capacity-building non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. that helps people transform conflictual relationships and design change processes around the world. The organization teaches processes towards more equitable, less violent futures using a five-stage dialogue process for community building, diplomacy, peacemaking, conflict transformation, collaboration, and reconciliation. SDI defines dialogue as "listening deeply enough to be changed by what you learn." The Sustained Dialogue Campus Network is the campus-focused branch of their work, where thousands of students, faculty, and staff are trained each year to create dialogue-to-action initiatives.

## The Better Arguments Project

The Better Arguments Project is a national civic initiative created to help bridge divides—not by papering over those divides but by helping people have better arguments. They partner with communities to bring principles of a better argument to practice. The Better Arguments Project is a collaboration by the Aspen Institute Citizenship and American Identity Program, Allstate, and Facing History and Ourselves.

## The Discussion Project

The Discussion Project, designed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, provides specialized professional learning courses to help you design and facilitate more engaging, inclusive, and intellectually rigorous discussion classrooms. The Discussion Project specializes in discussion pedagogy skill development.

## Unify America

Unify America is a nonpartisan nonprofit on a mission to replace political fighting with problem-solving. They leverage technology and games to reduce political polarization and teach civic and problem-solving skills so Americans can work together to reach our shared goals. Founded in 2020, Unify America builds interactive experiences to teach and master critical civic skills across cultural, political, racial, geographic, and religious differences. Their interactive experiences help people bust out of their bubbles, build civic muscles, and work together to tackle our country's biggest challenges.

## Understanding service provider audiences & resources available

To help you gain a better understanding of the landscape of bridge-building and civil discourse service providers, check out the following page to see the service providers featured on this list categorized by audience and resources offered.

This list was expanded and adapted from Interfaith America's [Bridgebuilding in Higher Education: A Landscape Analysis](#) Bridging Organizations Overview (Spring 2023).

	Faculty	Senior Admin	Staff	Students	Community	Communities of Practice	Consulting Services	Courses or Programs of Study	Co-Curricular Activities	Course-based & Curricular Resources	Funding Opportunities	Issue Guides	Monitoring & Evaluation	Network	Reports & Whitepapers	Speaker's Bureau	Campus Chapters	Toolkits	Webinars	Workshops or Training	
Braver Angels	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x				x		x					x
BridgeUSA	x	x		x			x							x			x				
Collaborative Discussion Project	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x			x					x			x
College Debates and Discourse Alliance	x		x	x					x	x								x			
Constructive Dialogue Institute	x		x	x		x	x		x	x			x		x			x	x		x
Essential Partners	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x					x	x		x
Everyday Democracy					x	x	x							x							x
Greater Good Science Center	x		x			x	x	x						x	x			x			
Heterodox Academy	x	x				x	x	x						x	x	x				x	
Institute for Citizen and Scholars			x	x			x								x						
Interfaith America Bridging the Gap Project	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x			x	x			x	x		x
Living Room Conversations	x		x	x	x		x		x	x	x					x		x			x
National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation	x	x	x		x				x	x				x							x
National Issues Forum	x		x						x	x	x			x	x			x			x
Sustained Dialogue Institute	x	x	x	x			x	x						x	x	x					x
The Better Arguments Project					x				x	x										x	x
The Discussion Project	x	x	x				x	x		x				x							x
Unify America	x		x	x	x		x		x	x				x						x	x

The information provided represents our understanding of the services and supports offered by each provider. Services may change frequently, so it is best to reach out directly to them for the most up-to-date information.

